

## KEEP FAMILIES IN THE COUNTRY

### OPPOSITION TO BILL 1 (2017) REVISED KOOLAU LOA SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES PLAN November 29, 2017

My name is Leilani Guerrero. I was born at Kahuku Hospital, raised in Laie, and a Kahuku High School valedictorian. My parents lived and worked in Laie and had dreams of purchasing a home in 1980 but it was not possible under the market and conditions back then. After retiring, despite their desire to stay in Hawaii, they had to resort to moving to the mainland where they could afford to live on their retirement income. All four of my brothers and sisters have moved to the mainland as well where they could find jobs and housing.

I was also offered opportunities to go to the mainland but declined because I didn't want to leave Hawaii, my home. Because of the lack of opportunities here in Koolau Loa, I took a job in and moved to Honolulu. After 8 years in the work force, I've been lucky enough to be able to secure a job back in my home town and rent an apartment in Kaneohe. Currently over 2 hours of my day is spent sitting in Kaneohe traffic and driving in the salt spray of Kamehameha Highway to and from daycare and work, leaving precious little time with my toddler and maintaining my rented apartment and no time for community involvement.

My husband has a dream of owning a home and I have a dream of living in Hawaii and living close to my place of work so that I can be there for my children and be more involved in my community. Growing up in Laie, my parents would often walk to work and I would walk to school and often walk to my parent's work place after school as well. I have beautiful memories of participating in community events as a child. My heart aches seeing other children in the community and parents supporting them in school functions or community activities knowing that having to drive so far just to be there for my children and provide them with positive experiences makes it ten times more difficult, less frequent and not in this wonderful tight-knit community of Laie and the greater Red Raider country.

With the lack of affordable housing in the area, the possibility of realizing that dream here is next to impossible for us. The only people we see living that dream are receiving help of some kind, whether it comes from wealthy family members putting in the down payment, bringing in wealth from outside of the islands, receiving housing stipends from the military, or, frankly, living on top of each other in multigenerational family homes. Unfortunately, my family does not fit any of those situations as all of our family are off island and any extra money we are able to save up for a down payment went to supporting other extended family members in more dire situations than us. In talking with real-estate friends and looking for a home within reach, we are told to look in other areas even further from work than we are now. Even that dreams seems un reachable.

Renting a home in Hawaii pushes several families into poverty and the welfare system. We've looked for more affordable rentals and can't find anything within reach. As my family and I strive to live responsible lives with both parents working full time, to not have to depend on

“the system”, and to participate in our communities all the while struggling to make a life for ourselves here, the limited opportunities for affordable housing close to our jobs limits our ability to improve our situation including our prospects of having a second child and avoid living paycheck to paycheck. If this pushes us to have to move to the mainland, my children will not be able to experience all of the unique and beautiful things that contribute to growing up in Hawaii and tie my children back to their Hawaiian heritage and traditions.

The housing situation in Hawaii is so devastating with so many of us in the same situation with little opportunities to improve our situations, we are left to be displaced with broken dreams. Hawaii, like all of us, is always changing, either improving or slipping into decay. Koolau Loa has produced wonderful, smart, talented children. We need to feed those children with opportunities to stay and improve the community where they came from instead of leaving to benefit more affordable communities elsewhere as I have seen the majority of my classmates and fellow valedictorians do. We want to be a part of a positive change for good of the family centered community that Koolau Loa has always been but we can't do that if Hawaii is left for only those who can afford to live here.

**Please oppose Bill 1 (2017) and add back the affordable housing to the Koolau Loa Sustainable Communities Plan.**